



Exploring Scottish Kirk Session Records

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WHAT ARE KIRK SESSIONS?

Kirk sessions were meetings of local leaders of the Church of Scotland. The kirk session was the lowest church court and began in 1560. In these meetings, local church leaders would conduct the business of the parish or congregation. This included poor relief, education, finances, disciplinary actions. These records can potentially break down some brick walls, be helpful in filling in more detail about your Scottish ancestors and can give clues about ancestors who were not part of the Church of Scotland. They can also assist you in cases where your ancestor moved or illegitimacy.

Kirk session records were kept by the “session clerk”. The information found in kirk session records varies from parish to parish and from clerk to clerk. There were no forms or standard way of keeping these records. Thus, you never know what you will find until you search the records. These are some of the types of records you may find with the kirk session.

- Minutes from the kirk session (dealt with spiritual matters), managers’ and trustees’ minutes (dealt with temporal matters), and minutes of special committees, etc.
- Accounts and other financial records (collection plate, fines as a result of disciplinary action, mortcloth dues), Free Church (established in 1843) Deacons’ Court (managed the finances) minutes
- Baptisms, marriages, and burials
- Communion rolls and other lists of members of the congregation
- Certificates of transference
- Legal registers
- Population statistics

KIRK SESSION RECORDS AT FAMILYSEARCH.ORG

“Scotland Church Records and Kirk Session Records, 1658-1919”

This collection at FamilySearch.org includes baptisms, marriages (including proclamations of banns), and burials found in the records of Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries (church court for several parishes/areas), and Synods (church court for several Presbyteries).

“Scotland Presbyterian and Protestant Church Records, 1736-1990”

This collection at FamilySearch.org includes Presbyterians who seceded from the established Church of Scotland and nonconformists. The names from this collection come from the parish

registers and baptisms, marriages, and burials found in kirk session records.

Finding Kirk Session Records in the FamilySearch Catalog

- Click **Search**, then **Catalog**.
- Type the name of the parish in the Place search field
- Click on the topic **Church records**
- Look for titles that include “Kirk Session” or “Church Records”
- Many of these records must be viewed at the Family History Library, a family history center, or affiliate library.

KIRK SESSION RECORDS ON SCOTLANDSPEOPLE

Search by Personal Name

Baptisms, marriages, and burials discovered in kirk session records are searchable on ScotlandsPeople.

- Click **Advanced people search**
- Select **Church registers**
- Choose the type of event
- Select **Other Churches**

These include members of other Presbyterian congregations not part of the Church of Scotland. You need to register for a free account or log in to search the indexes. You may view an image of the original record by purchasing credits.

Browse by Place

Images of original kirk session records are available to view at ScotlandsPeople’s “Virtual Volumes.” They have over 6,000 volumes from the Church of Scotland and other Presbyterian churches’ kirk sessions, presbyteries, and synods from 1560 to 1870.

- Click **Search our records**
- Select **Virtual Volumes** and then **Search for a volume**
- Browse record creators or search record creators

You may view original kirk session records for free but must buy credits to save or download. Each image costs two credits.

There is also a very helpful guide to kirk session records available on ScotlandsPeople.

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